

Theoretical study of triple bonds to germanium: relative stabilities of germanitriles and germainines

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Both B3LYP and CCSD(T) computational results suggest that fluorine substitution can dramatically stabilize $\text{FGe}\equiv\text{N}$, with respect to $\text{Ge}=\text{NF}$, both from a kinetic and from a thermodynamic viewpoint.

The chemistry of unsaturated organometallic compounds with multiple bonds between a group 14 atom and a heteroatom has assumed increasing importance during the last two decades, as shown by the large number of reviews¹ dealing with both experimental and theoretical aspects. In organogermanium chemistry, several very interesting new compounds with $\text{p}\pi\text{--p}\pi$ bonds between the heteroatoms have been reported: $\text{Ge}=\text{C}$,² $\text{Ge}=\text{O}$,³ $\text{Ge}=\text{S}$,⁴ $\text{Ge}=\text{Ge}$ ⁵ and $\text{Ge}=\text{N}$.⁶ Of these species, the germainines, compounds with a $\text{Ge}=\text{N}$ double bond, have been studied extensively both experimentally⁷ and theoretically.⁸ Although there have been a great number of reports concerning the chemical and physical properties of these stable species, stable compounds with a $\text{Ge}\equiv\text{N}$ triple bond (*i.e.* germanitriles) are still unknown. Naturally, the steric protection of the linear grouping of atoms in the triple bond system is much less possible than for a double bond system so that prospective syntheses are very problematical. Indeed, it has already been proposed that compounds of triply bonded germanium are the next frontier.^{9,10}

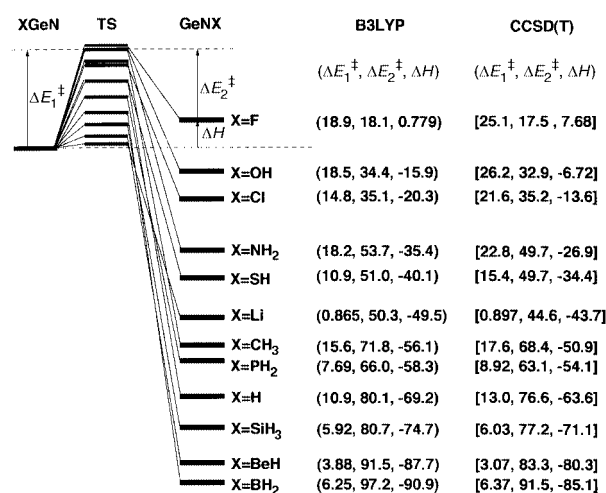
These novel germanitriles raise a number of intriguing questions regarding their structures, energies, physical properties, and stabilities. Experimental difficulties have so far frustrated attempts to answer these questions. Nevertheless, this information can be obtained by the application of reliable computational methods. Thus, in this work we use carefully calibrated density functional theory (DFT) and high level *ab initio* computations to predict systems where $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$ is more stable than the isomeric $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$, and where relatively large barriers separate the two isomers, hoping to stimulate experimental testing of these theoretical predictions.

To the best of our knowledge, no quantum chemical calculations for such compounds have yet been carried out, let alone a systematic theoretical study of substituent effects on the stabilities of germanitrile species. In view of the interest in isolating compounds containing a $\text{Ge}\equiv\text{N}$ triple bond, we consider the possibility of stabilizing this moiety with various substituents. At present, we report a theoretical study concerning the effect of various substituents X (X = H, Li, BeH, BH_2 , CH_3 , SiH_3 , NH_2 , PH_2 , OH, SH, F and Cl) on the relative stability of $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$ and $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$ isomers, as well as on the transition states connecting them.

Three regions on the potential energy surfaces are considered in this work: $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$ (germanitriles), the transition states, and $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$ (germainines); see eqn. (1) in Table 1. The geometries and energetics of the stationary points on the potential energy surface of eqn. (1) have been calculated using non-localized DFT in conjunction with the 6-311++G(d,p) basis set, which is denoted as B3LYP/6-311++G(d,p).¹¹ All the stationary points have been positively identified as equilibrium structures (number of imaginary frequencies $N_{\text{imag}} = 0$) or transition states ($N_{\text{imag}} = 1$). Single-point energies were also calculated

at CCSD(T)(frozen)/6-311++G(3df,3pd)//B3LYP/6-311++G(d,p) (hereafter designated CCSD(T)), to improve the treatment of electron correlation. Unless otherwise noted, relative energies given in the text are those determined at CCSD(T) and include vibrational zero-point energy (ΔZPE) corrections determined at B3LYP/6-311++G(d,p).¹²

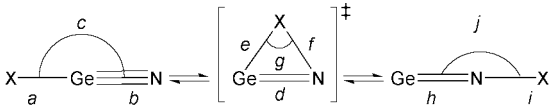
The results of our theoretical study of unimolecular reaction [eqn. (1)] are summarized in the schematic reaction profiles in Scheme 1. Selected geometrical parameters of $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$, $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$, and the transition state for the reaction are collected in Table 1. Several intriguing results from Scheme 1 and Table 1 are as follows.



Scheme 1

First, as one can see in Scheme 1, the calculated energy difference between $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$ and $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$, ΔH , is strongly dependent on the substituent X. Namely, for most substituents (*i.e.* X = H, Li, BeH, BH_2 , CH_3 , SiH_3 , NH_2 , PH_2 , OH, SH and Cl), germainines, $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$, are more stable than the isomeric germanitriles, $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$, by -6.7 to -85 kcal mol⁻¹ at the B3LYP and CCSD(T) levels of theory. Additionally, it is apparent in Scheme 1 that electronegative substituents can reduce the energy difference between $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$ and $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$. Furthermore, ΔH is positive only for X = F. That is to say, $\text{FGe}\equiv\text{N}$ is more stable than the corresponding $\text{Ge}=\text{NF}$ by 7.7 kcal mol⁻¹ at the same level of theory. It is therefore predicted that the more electronegative the substituent, the more stable the germanitrile ($\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$).

Secondly, it is found that the energy difference (ΔH) between $\text{XGe}\equiv\text{N}$ and $\text{Ge}=\text{NX}$ increases as the X element moves from left to right across both the first-row (from B to F) and second-row (from Si to Cl) in the periodic table. For instance, ΔH increases in the order (in kcal mol⁻¹): BH_2 (-85) < CH_3 (-51) < NH_2 (-27) < OH (-6.7) < F ($+7.7$) and SiH_3 (-71) < PH_2 (-54) < SH (-34) < Cl (-14). In addition, there is a reduction in ΔH energies between the first- and second-row X substituents. That is, CH_3 > SiH_3 , NH_2 > PH_2 , OH > SH, and F > Cl. The

Table 1 Geometrical parameters of structures for eqn. (1) at the B3LYP/6-311++G(d,p) level of theory (distances in Å, angles in degrees)


X	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
H	1.522	1.638	180.0	1.714	1.573	2.313	47.79	1.657	1.006	180.0
Li	2.415	1.660	180.0	1.666	2.414	3.755	18.90	1.677	1.748	180.0
BeH	2.160	1.649	180.0	1.672	2.177	3.246	27.99	1.677	1.499	180.0
BH ₂	2.021	1.651	180.0	1.690	2.066	2.830	36.33	1.682	1.398	179.9
CH ₃	1.959	1.642	180.0	1.715	2.089	2.696	39.51	1.663	1.423	179.9
SiH ₃	2.400	1.646	180.0	1.686	2.443	3.289	29.81	1.671	1.723	180.0
NH ₂	1.822	1.646	173.8	1.755	1.938	2.626	41.93	1.675	1.356	174.6
PH ₂	2.342	1.647	172.3	1.703	2.414	3.163	32.15	1.675	1.694	171.1
OH	1.773	1.649	173.9	1.792	1.865	2.519	45.28	1.673	1.354	169.1
SH	2.221	1.648	176.5	1.736	2.298	2.967	35.72	1.679	1.657	171.9
F	1.748	1.651	180.0	1.834	1.827	2.413	48.88	1.670	1.346	180.0
Cl	2.145	1.649	180.0	1.770	2.241	2.867	38.13	1.673	1.660	180.0

reason for these trends can easily be understood in terms of the X–Ge vs. X–N bond energies. Generally speaking, elements which are more electronegative than Ge increase the XGe≡N vs. XN=Ge energy differences (relative to X = H), while more electronegative elements decrease them. For example, ΔH is positive for X = F, where a very strong F–Ge bond and a very weak F–N bond¹³ can overturn the large (ca. 64 kcal mol^{−1}) intrinsic preference of HN=Ge over HGe≡N.

Thirdly, as we can see in Scheme 1, electronegative substitution not only reduces the energy gap (ΔH) between XGe≡N and Ge=N–X, but it also raises the barrier (ΔE_1^\ddagger) to the XGe≡N → Ge=N–X isomerization, thus increasing the kinetic stability of the germanitrile molecules. For instance, our CCSD(T) calculations suggest that the barrier for the isomerization of XGe≡N to Ge=N–X decreases in the order (in kcal mol^{−1}): X = OH (26) > X = F (25) > X = NH₂ (23) > X = Cl (22) > X = CH₃ (18) > X = SH (15) > X = H (13) > X = PH₂ (8.9) > X = BH₂ (6.4) ≈ X = SiH₃ (6.0) > X = BeH (3.1) > X = Li (0.90). Likewise, the barrier height (ΔE_2^\ddagger) for the reverse reaction (from Ge=N–X to XGe≡N) is also dependent on the electronegativity of substituents X. That is to say, the more electronegative the substituent, the smaller the activation barrier from Ge=N–X to XGe≡N. For example, our CCSD(T) results indicate that the trend in activation energy (ΔE_2^\ddagger ; in kcal mol^{−1}) mirrors the trend in electronegativity of the substituent: X = F (18) < X = OH (33) < X = Cl (35) < X = Li (45) < X = NH₂ (50) ≈ X = SH (50) < X = PH₂ (63) < X = CH₃ (68) < X = H (77) ≈ X = SiH₃ (77) < X = BeH (83) < X = BH₂ (91). Taken together, our theoretical findings suggest that fluorine is a particularly appealing possibility because of the strength of the Ge–F bond.

In summary, from our survey of the unimolecular isomerization of XGe≡N → Ge=N–X reactions, the present computational results predict that germanitrile XGe≡N itself lies at the minimum of the potential energy surface, and can be strongly stabilized in both a kinetic and thermodynamic sense with a proper choice of substituents. In particular, based on the DFT and CCSD(T) results, we confidently predict that FGe≡N should be stable with respect to the products of unimolecular isomerization and should be the most likely of the species to be detected experimentally.

We encourage experimentalists to carry out further experiments to confirm our predictions.

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